



Homes for Generations

# Solutions

Winter/Spring 2008

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## Habitat joins Aeon to meet one neighborhood's goals

**W**hen Aeon sat down with residents in the Harrison Neighborhood of north Minneapolis to talk about their goals for the redevelopment of a vacant site on Penn and Glenwood avenues, home ownership opportunities were identified as a key priority. In response, eight owner-occupied townhomes became part of the Ripley Gardens development. To complete the townhomes portion of the development, Aeon sought and found a partner with unparalleled experience in home ownership and a shared commitment to providing affordable homes for Twin Cities residents. Susan Haigh, President & CEO of Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, shares her reflections on the organization's first-ever partnership with Aeon.

### Why did Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity decide to get involved in this development?

The Harrison Neighborhood Association immediately around Ripley Gardens wanted homeownership as one of the options on the site, and that's really how it all started. Aeon reached out to us to be a homeownership partner and we said "yes, what a fantastic opportunity". Ultimately, we got involved because it was a chance to positively impact the neighborhood, provide good quality housing, and work with a great partner.

### What has the experience of partnering with Aeon been like for Habitat?

Aeon expects high quality in the housing product that it develops, and it was a good experience for us to be involved with a partner who sets such high standards. Aeon had a vision of what Ripley Gardens was going to be. They saw that the project could be many things – it could be historic, it could be environmental, and it could still be affordable. I think this development allowed us to work at very high levels because of our partnership.



Susan Haigh, President & CEO,  
Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity

**"I think Ripley Gardens allowed us to work at very high levels because of our partnership."**



Aeon partnered with Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity to create eight for-sale townhomes as part of the Ripley Gardens Development

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### What has been most rewarding about this development?

This development has absolutely transformed the neighborhood. This was a fantastic economic investment. Several of the Twin Cities Habitat sponsors felt it was important to help rebuild and reinvest in this neighborhood. The entire site was a positive investment that provides good quality, lasting, and affordable housing and homeownership.

### What has been most challenging about this development?

It was actually quite a small site for our volunteer groups. Combine that with our construction staff, Aeon's construction managers and project managers, as well as the general contractors that were all onsite at the same time — it was a pretty tight fit and made for some challenging moments.

The other big challenge was the multiple layers of subsidy needed for Ripley Gardens, which put us on a longer timeline than desired.

### How was this development different from others you've undertaken?

The fact that the site was on the national historic register made the site both challenging and rewarding for us; everyday we were faced with something new and different. Twin Cities Habitat has a series of home designs that we work with that could not be applied here. Working on a historic site means the design elements in any new building must compliment the original structures. Our townhome designs at Ripley are like nothing we have ever done before. However, I couldn't be more pleased with the results – I think the townhomes look absolutely terrific!

### What were your goals when you undertook this development?

Twin Cities Habitat has a commitment as an organization to grow and improve our sustainable development practice. One great thing about Ripley Gardens is that it really allowed us to reach new levels of environmental sustainability in the type of design work that we do.

I also loved the idea that we preserved the existing landscaping — there were beautiful trees on the site that were saved, as well as

the addition of rain gardens. It's such a pleasant and appealing site, and shows what you can achieve if you have a true "green" vision.

And, we like to work in partnership to provide a mix of rental and homeownership units, serving a range of family incomes. We were able to build eight townhomes, or about 15 percent of our home production for the year on this one site.

### Any other thoughts?

One of the most positive things about the development is the fact that we were sought out as a partner, both by Aeon and the Harrison Neighborhood Association. It was a powerful partnership. We are pleased to be a part of something so meaningful — something that will have a lasting, enduring impact on the neighborhood.

## Building neighborhood partnerships

Plans for new affordable housing often raise a chorus of concerns among neighborhood residents. But Aeon has developed positive partnerships with neighborhoods and communities for decades. Housing Development Vice President Gina Ciganik offers four strategies for creating successful neighborhood partnerships.



Gina Ciganik , Housing Development Vice President

**Strategy #1: Learn about the community.** "Community residents aren't interested in a developer that falls from the sky and knows nothing about the surrounding community. It's important to learn about the neighborhood or community: physically, socially, any trends that may be occurring, whether it's growing quickly or needs investment. Learn as much as you can. Bring all that knowledge to the first meeting with community members and that will help start the relationship in a positive manner."

**Strategy #2: Exchange ideas.** "Creating a vision for a new development starts with a learning process — learning the goals, needs, and wishes of the community. Would they like to see a grocery store, green space, a neighborhood restaurant? The other part is educating community members about what it takes economically to make a development feasible. Aeon can provide the tools community members need to have a conversation around what will work. Part of our role is also to help a neighborhood realize its broader goals, and that extends beyond the boundaries of our development. If we can't accommodate a grocery store in the development, we can suggest a location two blocks down that might work. We would also provide information dispelling myths they may have about the impact of affordable housing in a neighborhood."

**Strategy #3: Expand the conversation.** "In addition to the formal neighborhood organization, reach out to a variety of stakeholders. Include homeowners, renters, workers, business owners, immigrants — people across the spectrum. And it may not be enough to invite people to the neighborhood planning meeting — not everyone feels comfortable in the same venues. Instead, go to them. To get input from Hmong residents, arrange a meeting at the Hmong American community center."

**Strategy #4: Promise you'll stick around, and mean it.** "Some developers own a building for five years and then sell it. Aeon is committed to being good stewards of a property for 100 years to come. That means ensuring that it's well-maintained, well-managed, and financially healthy. Communities want to know that you'll be a good neighbor and a good steward of the property well into the future."

## New and Newsworthy



Ripley Gardens townhomes

Check out our  
new website at  
[www.aeonhomes.org](http://www.aeonhomes.org)

### Ripley Gardens opens

Ripley Gardens, Aeon's renovation of a former maternity hospital site in north Minneapolis, is seeing new life as apartments and townhomes. The development was completed in August and its 52 rental units and 8 for-sale townhomes were largely occupied by September.

The site, located on Penn and Glenwood avenues, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was home to a maternity hospital founded by Dr. Martha Ripley, one of the region's first female doctors, and operated from 1896 to 1956.

Aeon preserved the site's three historic buildings and added three new buildings: a 31-unit apartment building and two sets of townhomes, developed in partnership with Habitat for Humanity. The site also features green space, underground parking, walking paths, and a memorial garden dedicated to Dr. Ripley.

### Aeon receives national recognition

Aeon received an honorable mention at the Seventeenth Annual Maxwell Awards of Excellence luncheon on January 25, sponsored by the Fannie Mae Foundation and the Partnership to End Long Term Homelessness. Aeon was awarded a \$10,000 grant to continue its work in the field of supportive housing for homeless youth.

Aeon was selected from a pool of over 150 applicants to be considered for a Maxwell Award for Excellence, a national competition to recognize outstanding leaders in the field of supportive housing.

"The Fannie Mae Foundation commends Aeon for their outstanding efforts to prevent and end homelessness. We are pleased to award Aeon a grant to continue its efforts to provide supportive housing to homeless youth," said Peter Beard, executive director of the Fannie Mae Foundation.

"Aeon has greatly improved the lives of homeless youth through their ability to provide appropriate supportive services and permanent housing for their residents. They are a wonderful example of an organization committed to ending homelessness in their communities," said Bob Hohler, executive director of the Melville Charitable Trust and executive committee chairman of the Partnership to End Long Term Homelessness.

St. Barnabas opened in 2005 and provides 39 homeless and at-risk youth with a safe place to call home. "The positive working relationship Aeon has with YouthLink and Property Solutions & Services is what provides the environment for our youth to envision new possibilities for their future," says Alan Arthur, president, Aeon. Gina Ciganik, Aeon; Josephine Pufpaff, YouthLink; and Commissioner Tim Marx, Minnesota Housing joined Arthur in Washington DC to receive this national recognition.

Winners and runners up were selected by an independent advisory committee for having produced the best examples of supportive housing in four categories: Housing for Homeless Veterans; Housing for Chronically Homeless Individuals; Housing for Homeless Youth; and Housing for Homeless Families.

This award clearly recognizes how a bold vision and a unique partnership can create new possibilities for our youth. St. Barnabas is exemplary of the success that happens when you bring together a diverse group of people and organizations to address a critical community problem.



## Development Updates



### Clover Field Marketplace

Construction has begun on 117 apartments and 12,000 square feet of commercial space in Chaska. The development is part of a traditionally designed neighborhood. It's expected to be completed in early 2009.



### The Wellstone

The financing has closed on the Wellstone, Phase III of the Franklin-Portland Gateway development, which will provide 49 units of housing and 7,000 square feet of commercial space. Construction has begun and is expected to be completed in early 2009.



### Old Third Townhomes

Aeon is partnering with Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity to construct and sell eight three-bedroom townhomes for families. Construction is expected to begin in summer 2008. The overall development also includes Clare Apartments, which provides affordable homes for persons living with HIV and AIDS.



Homes for Generations

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[www.aeonhomes.org](http://www.aeonhomes.org)

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